



Department of Health Issues

Emergency Regulations Expanding Use of Narcan to Prevent Opioid Overdose Deaths

March 17, 2014

Director of Health, Michael Fine, MD, has issued emergency regulations aimed at preventing opioid overdose deaths by expanding access to the overdose antidote, naloxone (also known as Narcan), and establishing procedures for its administration to a person experiencing an overdose.

Rhode Island is in the midst of a severe drug overdose crisis, as evidenced by the 55 opioid-related deaths HEALTH has investigated since the beginning of the year. In addition to drug-abuse prevention and treatment strategies, getting Narcan into the hands of more people has become an immediate priority in the fight to save lives.

Dating back to at least 1988, Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) have carried Narcan as a standing-order medication that can be administered to individuals for whom it is not specifically prescribed.

Under the new regulations:

- Any licensed prescriber can now issue a non-patient-specific order to certain organizations, such as police departments and treatment facilities;
- Narcan can be prescribed to a family member or friend of an individual at risk of experiencing an opioid-related overdose;
- Any licensed prescriber may now dispense Narcan to family members or others on site, during an office or emergency department visit.

These changes enable Narcan to be in the hands of those most likely to discover an overdose victim. This could potentially save a life that could otherwise be lost if the victim had to wait for an EMT to administer the antidote.

Last month, the State Police announced plans to carry Narcan. Several local police departments are considering the same. The new regulations will allow all departments to easily obtain it.

When administered in a timely way, Narcan counteracts the life-threatening depression of the central nervous and respiratory systems caused by an overdose. Narcan has reportedly reversed more than 10,000 overdoses nationwide. Since January 1, 2014, EMTs have administered 273 doses of Narcan to Rhode Island patients. Narcan is still available without a prescription at all Walgreens pharmacies in Rhode Island.

The full version of the new *Rules and Regulations Pertaining to Opioid Overdose Prevention* can be found at:

<http://sos.ri.gov/documents/archives/regdocs/released/pdf/DOH/7687.pdf>